

The FREEDOM Support Act: 20th Anniversary

Remarks

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Ceremony to Commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the FREEDOM Support Act

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Coordinator Rosenblum: I'm Dan Rosenblum, the Coordinator of U.S. Assistance to Europe and Eurasia, and we're here today to mark two milestones: Almost exactly 20 years ago in October 1992 President George H.W. Bush signed the Freedom for Russia and Emerging [Eurasian] Democracies and Open Markets Act, or FREEDOM Support Act -- you probably didn't know that FREEDOM was an acronym -- it was -- thereby authorizing the United States to provide assistance to the 12 newly independent states of the former Soviet Union.

Congress passed the FREEDOM Support Act with overwhelming bipartisan support and the full support of the Bush administration, and there was a strong consensus at the time that the United States had to respond decisively as well as generously and creatively to the unprecedented situation that had arisen after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Freedom Support Act was intended to help the people and governments of these newly independent states navigate the difficult transition from communism to democracy and market-based economies. That transition has taken longer, I think, than the authors of the FREEDOM Support Act expected or imagined, and there have been some great successes and great progress -- some of the other speakers will talk about that later. But, of course, enormous challenges remain, as we're well aware.

But looking back 20 years ago, we shouldn't forget that in 1992 we were also terribly concerned about stability. We were witnessing in most of the region a catastrophic economic depression, and in some areas, armed conflict. The so-called frozen conflicts that still exist today in Georgia, between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and in Moldova, were hot conflicts then. There was real fear of widespread social unrest as the creaky infrastructure of the Soviet state collapsed. And it was in this atmosphere that Operation Provide Hope was conceived, and that brings me to the second reason why we're here today.

Operation Provide Hope was the first U.S. government program under the Freedom Support Act and the first to deliver direct and tangible aid to needy and conflict-affected populations of the region. The urgent crisis that led to its creation didn't last, but there's been no shortage of people in need -- nor has there been shortage of conflict -- in the 20 years since. And in those 20 years, Operation Provide Hope has provided high quality medical care to millions, improved the quality of life for many more vulnerable people residing in state orphanages, senior citizen

homes, and medical facilities, and provided shelter, clothing and other relief to victims of natural and manmade disaster.

Today we're marking the last major C-17 flight that is being carried out together with the Physicians with Heart Program, that's worked closely with our Operation Provide Hope throughout the 20 year period. This partnership brings together private citizens, private companies and governments to meet the needs of the most vulnerable and to share expertise with local counterparts.

The flight today will be the 985th air shipment to be executed under Operation Provide Hope. Yes, you heard that right -- 985 flights. Operation Provide Hope has also executed over 24,000 surface shipments, delivering a combined value of \$4.96 billion -- almost \$5 billion -- in American humanitarian assistance to the countries of the former Soviet Union.

This afternoon a U.S. Air Force C-17 aircraft will take volunteers recruited under the Physicians with Heart program to Chisinau, Moldova, to spend a week sharing their medical expertise with their Moldovan counterparts. That aircraft will also take cargo worth nearly \$12 million in pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and supplies to be distributed to needy people in Moldova. The medicines on this flight were all donated by American pharmaceutical companies.

Operation Provide Hope was doing public-private partnerships before the term existed and certainly before it became fashionable. It continues to this day as a premier example of what can be accomplished when the resources of the U.S. government and the U.S. private sector combine with the enthusiasm and generosity of American volunteers and NGOs.

I want to just take a minute here to recognize the staff who have made that Operation Provide Hope possible over these many years, and it's largely the same people who were doing it 20 years ago: Jerry Oberndorfer, who's somewhere in the room; Nicole Shank; and John Post, who is not with us today because he is on the ground in Moldova preparing the way for the delivery.

There are lots of other distinguished guests here today. Some of them will be introduced because they're speaking, but I also want to recognize in particular Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake for South and Central Asian Affairs. I also want to recognize -- I don't know, I didn't see her come in -- Ambassador Mary Pendleton -- yes, former U.S. Ambassador to Moldova; Tom Adams, who is one of my predecessors and now the Special Coordinator for Haiti; and David Binns from McFadden & Associates, which employs the people who work on Operation Provide Hope.

I also want to note two people who expressed their regrets that they couldn't be with us here today: Richard Armitage, former Deputy Secretary of State and the first Coordinator of Assistance to the newly independent states who expressed deep regret that he couldn't join us today. And former Coordinator Dick Morningstar who expressed deep regret that he's in Baku. [Laughter]. His regret is not necessarily that he is in Baku, but -- [Laughter].

I also want to thank the ACE staff who all pitched in to make the event possible today and especially Sandra Clark, Endrit Demi and Sasha Gupman who made it all possible.

But now it's my great honor to introduce Dr. Philip Gordon, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, who has been in that role since May 2009 and is responsible for managing our foreign policy towards a mere 50 countries in Europe and Eurasia, maintaining our relationship with NATO, the EU, and the OSCE.

Phil is also my boss, and over the past three and a half years has been wonderfully supportive of our office and of this mission. Phil.

Assistant Secretary Gordon: Thanks so much, not just for those kind words but really for everything you have done to support this program which is such a central part of what we're trying to do in the European Bureau.

I also want to welcome or add to your welcome to Ambassador Munteanu of Moldova, Representative Obey, Dr. Morsch, and other NGO representatives who have joined us today -- and I really am delighted and honored to participate in such an important anniversary of such an important program.

Others after me who have been involved in this program will speak a bit more in detail about the program itself, but let me just begin by putting it in the context of what we're trying to achieve in terms of our policies towards Europe and Eurasia in building this Europe whole, free, democratic and at peace, which we can only do if we work to provide the sort of assistance that these economies and societies need to develop towards that goal.

With the adoption of the Freedom Support Act in October 1992, I think the United States government showed very strong bipartisan support for providing just this sort of assistance to those transitioning, and it developed unique mechanisms with which to establish the Europe that we're trying to achieve, and I think we can honestly say -- and be proud of what we've done -- that today this aspiration has been largely achieved, in much of the continent, with the help of U.S. assistance through tools like the SEED Act. We've seen Central European countries become valued members of NATO and the European Union.

We've also seen significant progress in fostering Euro-Atlantic integration in other parts of Europe such as the Western Balkans.

We really look towards Europe, towards this expanding democratic, peaceful and stable Europe as a partner of first resort in confronting the global challenges that we face. We've been very clear from the start of this administration that we know we can only deal with these immense global challenges if we have strong, democratic, stable and prosperous partners, and all of the work that so many in this room have done over the past 20 years has helped us reach that goal.

Over the last 20 years the United States has provided \$15 billion in assistance to 12 countries of the former Soviet Union; we've supported the work of NGOs to develop civil society, promote human rights, and fundamental freedoms and build independent media; we've encouraged the development of market economies, including through the establishment of enterprise funds, that succeeded beyond, I think, anyone's hopes and expectations and have served as a model for assistance to other transitioning countries. And we have addressed transnational challenges such as stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and materials;

combating violent extremism; and finding solutions to armed conflict, pandemic disease and climate change.

Let me say a particular word about Moldova. This work, I think, has made a measurable difference in the lives of so many people across the region, but nowhere is that more true than in Moldova, the country that we're recognizing today with the celebration of this final flight of humanitarian assistance under Operation Provide Hope.

Moldova has made remarkable progress on implementing political and economic reforms that are necessary steps along the road to its European integration -- often cited as a model for others in the region that are striving to move along that goal.

I think its selection as an MCC country, the Millennium Challenge Corporation compact that it received, further demonstrates symbolically, but also in real terms, the progress that Moldova has made.

The United States has actively engaged with Moldova throughout its transition and we remain committed to supporting its continued reform efforts while we also remain proud of what we've accomplished together.

We all know that there's more work to be done -- notwithstanding all of the progress that I have referred to. As we all know, in other places in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, there has been significant back-sliding on democratic practices. The transition to open market economies really remains incomplete, and so long as it is, social problems will still exist; corruption will continue to impede progress.

Earlier this week we saw another example of the serious challenges we still face with the unfortunate decision of the Russian government to require the closure of our USAID mission in Moscow -- as we've said, we deeply regret that decision; we're proud of everything USAID has accomplished in Russia over the past 20 years; the Russian decision will remove an important element in U.S.-Russian cooperation and halt programs that have brought significant benefits to the Russian people over the last two decades. But I want to be clear: the United States will continue to support civil society, democracy and human rights in Russia, as we will continue our principal engagement with governments and civil society across the FREEDOM Support Act countries, in order to maintain our support for democratic and economic reforms as well as continued stability and security.

So let me just conclude by reinforcing Dan's thanks to so many who are here who have been so intimately involved in this program over the years, starting with Dan himself -- with whom I've enjoyed working over the past three and a half years; I've really seen his dedication towards the goals that I have just described.

I only learned this morning that Dan is actually on this flight this afternoon -- so for the auditors out there looking to see how efficiently we execute this process, I want them to know that he not only coordinates it, but he actually gets on the plane and personally hand-carries the assistance to where it needs to go -- so I think that's pretty commendable in itself.

But Bill Taylor, Carlos Pasqual, Dick Morningstar in his absence -- he's got his hands full elsewhere -- Tom Adams, I really appreciate all you have done, as well as everything that the staff who are well represented today -- not just the current staff, but former staffs over the years have done -- we're very grateful for that, and as I said, it has made a core contribution to our overall goals in Europe and Eurasia.

Thank you very much.